

RUSSIANS AGREE TO TALKS ON CURBING MISSILE RACE, OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE

**President Says Parley
Will Open in Moscow
—Discloses Letter**

*Transcript of news conference
is printed on Page 14.*

By JOHN W. FINNEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 2—President Johnson announced today that Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin had agreed to discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union on limiting the arms race in both offensive and defensive nuclear missiles.

The agreement was announced by the President at a brief, impromptu news conference outside his White House office.

The President disclosed that he wrote to the Soviet Premier on Jan. 27 suggesting measures to limit the missile arms race, which could otherwise be accelerated as a result of a Soviet decision to deploy an antimissile defense system around Moscow and perhaps other Soviet cities.

In reply, the President said, Premier Kosygin "confirmed the willingness of the Soviet Government to discuss means of limiting the arms race in offensive and defensive nuclear missiles."

Talks to Start in Moscow

The discussions will begin in Moscow, with Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson representing the United States. While no date has been set, the President expressed hope the discussions could begin at the "earliest possible" time. [Question 5, Page 14.]

The President said his Jan. 27 letter had been prompted largely by a desire to see if it would be possible to reach a missile limitation agreement before making a "final decision" whether the United States should start deploying a missile defense system.

"We would like to have some discussions and be sure we couldn't get an agreement before we made a very basic decision that was far-reaching, comprehensive and one on which we could not turn back," he said. [Question 7.]

The coming discussions are an outgrowth of overtures made by President Johnson in January in his State of the Union message for "some limitation on the arms race. At that time, the Administration let it be known that it was deferring deployment of an antiballistic missile system in the United States until it was determined whether an agreement could be reached with the Soviet Union to limit the accelerating missile race.

The Soviet Union has deployed a limited missile defense system around Moscow, and there are conflicting intelligence reports on whether similar missile defenses are being deployed in other areas. Because of this Soviet move, the Administration is under military as well as political pressure to authorize deployment of the Nike X missile defense system, which has been kept in the research and development stage.

While the Administration has tended to emphasize its desire for a United States-Soviet moratorium on deployment of antiballistic missiles, the proposal made to Moscow, according to Administration officials, was much broader and suggested possible limitations on offensive as well as defensive missiles.

Partial 'Freeze' Discounted

From the start, according to officials here, it was realized that it would be politically and militarily impractical to talk only in terms of a "freeze" on defensive missiles because of the interdependent relationship between offensive and defensive missiles in any military balance of power.

Thus, it was argued, the Soviet Union would not be interested in any halt on defensive missiles unless there was also some reciprocal limitation on offensive missiles, in which the United States has a 3-to-1 numerical advantage.

This appraisal of the probable Soviet reaction was confirmed when Premier Kosygin, on his trip to Britain last month, suggested that the basic problem was that of some control over offensive missiles, which he suggested were more objectionable than defensive missiles since they were designed to kill rather than save lives.

In effect, according to officials, the United States is reviving a proposal, first made before the Geneva disarmament conference in January, 1964, for "a freeze" on the numbers and characteristics of offensive and defensive strategic nuclear delivery vehicles. This is a term broad enough to encompass defensive missiles as well as strategic missiles and bombers.

Until now, the Soviet Union has expressed no interest at the

Geneva conference in the American "freeze" proposal, which President Johnson has suggested could be followed by a reduction in the number of delivery vehicles. But the Kosygin letter was interpreted by Administration officials as an indication of a changing Soviet attitude.

Behind this apparent shift, United States officials believe, are basic economic pressures on the Kremlin leaders. It is believed these leaders are becoming caught between the "rising expectations" of the Soviet people for more consumer goods and the growing burden of a big defense-space program borne by an economy only half as large as that of the United States.

For primarily economic reasons, therefore, it is presumed the Soviet leaders are no more eager than their American counterparts to embark on a massive missile defense system that would cost the equivalent of tens of billions of dollars, provoke an offsetting increase in offensive missiles, and in the end result in no basic change in the military balance of power.

While encouraged by the Soviet agreement to talks, United States officials emphasized that the two sides were still in "the most preliminary state of engagement" on a most complex subject directly involving, as past arms controls measure have not, the military security of the two nations.